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27th Annual Premiers' Conference

If there remain any doubts among producers as to the priority accorded agriculture in the Government of Alberta, and in provincial governments across Canada, the results of the recent Premiers' Conference should certainly lay them to rest.

Held in Edmonton August 10 - 12, the 27th Annual Premiers' Conference produced unanimous agreement on a number of key economic issues. Agricultural concerns were at the top of the list.

The Premiers made recommendations regarding foreign subsidies and unfair competition, the need for a national agriculture strategy, interprovincial trade barriers and other major agricultural concerns, demonstrating clearly their awareness of the special problems facing our industry.

The Premiers agreed that, in the short-term, assistance may be required by those sectors suffering from unfair international trade policies, and that they are determined to stand by Canadian farmers faced with destructive European and American subsidies.

In a communique issued after the conference, the provincial Premiers stated that they "would not let major Canadian resource sectors like agriculture, energy and lumber be ruined by (unfair) international competition." In particular, the Premiers deplored the United States' recent strategy of targeting subsidies at traditional Canadian markets in the USSR and elsewhere.

In response to such actions in the world market, the Pre-

miers issued a statement expressing "strong support for multilateral and bilateral negotiations to end the subsidy wars and re-establish equity to the international grain trade." The necessity of ensuring provincial participation in developing national policies in these negotiations was emphasized.

The Premiers also reaffirmed the importance and urgency of the work of provincial agriculture ministers in designing a national agricultural strategy. As the Premiers indicated, this strategy must not only address the short term needs of the agriculture industry, but must also contain initiatives that will ensure the continued growth and competitiveness of the industry at home and abroad.

Such a strategy has been in development since last November, when the First Ministers directed their ministers of agriculture to work together to create a comprehensive national approach to agricultural policy. Since then, several federal-provincial task forces have been examining areas critical to the future viability of agriculture in Canada.

As Premier Getty reported to the Legislature after the conference was concluded, this strategy will be completed as soon as possible so that it may be presented to the First Ministers' Conference on the Economy next November.

I would note that the agriculture strategy is to be a major item of discussion later this August at the Federal/Provincial Conference of Ministers of Agriculture in Victoria. I am confident my colleagues and I will be able

to develop a sound and comprehensive strategy for presentation to the First Ministers in November.

Another recommendation made by the provincial Premiers at the Edmonton conference was that agriculture must be a key issue at the upcoming round of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) talks. I am very pleased to note this support. In the past, this most important series of international trade discussions has failed to accord agriculture the high priority it merits.

In addition to making recommendations on international trade issues, the Premiers agreed with recommendations made by their ministers responsible for regional devel-

opment regarding interprovincial trade barriers. These recommendations include the placement of a moratorium on new barriers and the establishment of a permanent mechanism to reduce existing barriers.

All in all, the work completed in just two short days at the Premiers' Conference may well have a substantial impact on our agriculture industry for years to come. As Alberta's Minister of Agriculture, I support the recommendations regarding our industry put forward by Canada's Premiers, and look forward to representing Alberta's position as I work with the other provincial agriculture ministers to help implement them.

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